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# GENERAL NOTES.

*The Discovery of Nova Aquilae.* Telegrams announcing the appearance of a brilliant Nova in the constellation *Aquila* were received at the Lick Observatory on June 10, 1918, from the Harvard College Observatory, from Charles C. Conroy, Los Angeles, from J. C. Hammond, Baker, Oregon, from Miss Mary M. Hopkins, Cottage Grove, Oregon (sent from a Southern Pacific train), and from C. E. Adams, Government Astronomer at Wellington, New Zealand. H. C. O. Bulletin 658, printed June 10th, gives the names of no less than a dozen persons who sent announcements of the independent discovery of the star to the Harvard College Observatory, and it is probable that such announcements were received by telegram or letter at nearly every observatory in the world.

Under such conditions it is obviously difficult, if not impossible, to assign absolute priority in the discovery. So far as known at Harvard at the end of June, the first discovery was made by W. J. Luyten, Utrecht, Holland, on June 8th, 9<sup>h</sup>3<sup>m</sup> G. M. T.; the earliest American discovery by E. L. Gould, East Orange, N. J., on June 8th; but it is not at all improbable that observers in eastern Europe anticipated these discoveries. According to a letter from Dr. C. E. Adams, the star was first seen in New Zealand by C. V. Hudson, Wellington, on June 8th, 23<sup>h</sup>15<sup>m</sup> G. M. T.

Professor Pickering states that the Nova's early history, as recorded upon the plates in the Harvard Observatory photographic library, was promptly investigated. It appears that it was first photographed as early as May 22, 1888, "when it was of the 11th magnitude, and several hundred plates of it [secured in intervening years] are now being examined to study its variations [in brightness], which amount to at least half a magnitude. On June 3, 1918, it was of about normal magnitude. June 4th, 5th and 6th were cloudy. On June 7th it was sixth [photographic] magnitude."

"On June 8th it was about 0.5 magnitude, on June 9th, according to Barnard, -1.4 magnitude."\* "This is the brightest Nova since Kepler's Star in *Ophiuchus*, which appeared in 1604."

The Harvard record makes it clear that the Nova could not have

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\*In a personal letter to the present writer, Professor Barnard says: "On Sunday night, June 9th, at about 10 o'clock (Green River, Wyoming), I am sure it was as bright as *Sirius* if placed in the same position. It was at least 1½ or 1¾ magnitudes brighter than *Vega*." The magnitudes of *Sirius* and of *Vega* are -1.6 and 0.1, respectively, on the Harvard photometric scale.

been detected without telescopic aid until the evening of June 8th, by which time it was so brilliant as to attract the attention of any careful observer who chanced to look at the part of the sky where it appeared. Several of the accounts of discovery received here are of interest as showing the attention paid to the stars by non-professional observers. Thus, Manuel Arias, night watchman at Standard, Tuolumne Co., Cal., noticed the star on Sunday evening, June 9th, and recognized its character. That same evening, at 8.40, when the star was just rising, it was detected by Mr. Charles C. Conroy, a member of our Society, who has been interested in the heliacal risings and settings of the brighter stars. Mr. Conroy writes: "The horizon was a little cloudy, and when I first saw the object, it flashed out momentarily, then disappeared and reappeared. I watched it with a field-glass and satisfied myself that it was really a star." Such observations as these are genuine discoveries and are entitled to credit as such, notwithstanding the fact that they had been anticipated by others.

Notes on other pages give information relating to the accurate position of the Nova and to its spectrum. It is only necessary to add here that, as Professor Pickering says, the appearance of the Nova enables any person, even without instruments or previous experience, to make observations of permanent value to astronomy. H. C. O. Bulletin 66r, which will gladly be sent by the Harvard College Observatory (Cambridge, Mass.) to any one writing for it, contains a map and instructions. The star is now (July 17th) about 4th magnitude and, tho fading, may remain visible to the unaided eye for many weeks. It should be possible to follow it with a pair of opera or field-glasses for several months, if its light curve continues to resemble that of *Nova Persei*, No. 2.

R. G. A.

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*The Dominion Astrophysical Observatory.* On June 11th, the Dominion Astrophysical Observatory, at Victoria, B. C., was formally declared open by the Lieutenant-Governor, Sir Frank Stillman Barnard. Dr. J. S. Plaskett, the director of the observatory, gave the address of welcome to the visitors on this occasion, among whom were the leading government officials of the Province and a number of visiting scientific men. Dr. Ambrose Swasey and Dr. John A. Brashear gave some account, respectively, of the construction of the mounting of the telescope and of the figuring of the 72-

inch mirror; and Dr. W. W. Campbell, director of the Lick Observatory, spoke of the advances in our knowledge of the stars and nebulae which may reasonably be expected to result from the work of this great telescope.

A large telescope of this kind cannot, as Dr. Campbell pointed out, be devoted to searching for comets, new stars, satellites or planets. Its function is the study of the motions and of the physical properties of objects already known. At present the staff of the observatory, Dr. J. S. Plaskett and Dr. R. K. Young, are making measures of stellar radial velocities the chief feature of their observing program.

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*The Centenary of the American Journal of Science.* The first number of the *American Journal of Science* (*Silliman's Journal*) appeared in July, 1818. In his Introduction to the Centennial number of the *Journal*, July, 1918, the present editor, Professor Edward S. Dana, says: "This is the only scientific periodical in this country to maintain an uninterrupted existence since that early date, and this honor is shared with hardly more than half a dozen other independent scientific periodicals in the world at large." He might truthfully have added that it is the only scientific periodical whose entire financial and editorial responsibilities have been borne by the members of a single family. Founded by Benjamin Silliman, its successive owners and chief editors have been Benjamin Silliman, Jr., James Dwight Dana, the elder Silliman's son-in-law, and the present editor, grandson of the founder.

In the earlier volumes, and until comparatively recent times, articles on astronomical subjects, including records of original observations, frequently appeared in the *Journal*, which, in fact, covered nearly the whole field of natural science. Its columns are still open to articles in any branch of science but the rapid increase in the number of periodicals devoted to the interests of specific sciences has practically restricted the field open to the *American Journal* and the great majority of contributions at present relate to geology and kindred sciences and to chemistry.

The *American Journal of Science* has been a powerful factor in the development of scientific research in this country, and all lovers of science will repeat the sentiment expressed to the first editor nearly a century ago by Dr. Dorsey—"I wish, as the Spaniards say, that you may live a thousand years."

*Dawson's Micrometric Measures of Double Stars*\*. Mr. Bernhard H. Dawson has made a valuable contribution to the literature of double-star astronomy in this volume, for his work was planned carefully and carried out skilfully and the results have been arranged in convenient form. That the work was done with the 17-inch telescope of the La Plata Observatory adds to its value, for the double stars which are beyond the reach of observers in the northern hemisphere are specially in need of observation.

A well written introduction gives us the information we should want about the working program, the methods of measuring, and the consistency of the results. Mr. Dawson selected his stars mainly from the list of Sir John Herschel's discoveries at the Cape of Good Hope and adopted the plan of remeasuring all Herschel pairs within a definite sky area. Beginning at  $-42^\circ$  declination he has worked southward to a limit ranging from  $-58^\circ$  to  $-78^\circ$  in different hours of right ascension, and plans to extend the work to the south pole. About half of the Herschel pairs—985 to be precise—are included in the present publication. As many pairs discovered by other observers as could conveniently be measured are also included, bringing the total number of systems measured to 1305. A short list of stars north of  $-31^\circ$  declination is also printed.

The majority of the pairs are wide, ranging in angular separation from  $5''$  to more than  $30''$ , but a considerable number have distances of from  $1''$  to  $5''$  and an occasional pair is closer. Prevailing atmospheric conditions affected the choice of program to a certain degree, for Mr. Dawson frankly says that "it is a fact that our atmospheric conditions rarely allow us to use the full power of the instrument (which is really excellent) and a program made up solely of 'interesting' stars would be unobservable the greater part of the time."

A hint at the limits of the telescope's power is given by the fact that Mr. Dawson could not see the companion to A2241 on three nights in 1917 and could not separate A2244 on two good nights in the same year. It happens that I remeasured these pairs in that year with the following results:

STAR	DATE	ANGLE	DIST.	MAG.	
A2241	1917.56	$78^\circ.4$	$5''.18$	6.5-14.0	2n $36''$
A2244	1917.57	$154.5$	$0.20$	8.5-8.5	2n $36''$

\*Resultado de las Observaciones con la Ectuarial de 433 Milímetros de Abertura efectuadas de 1912 á 1917 por Bernhard H. Dawson. Tomo IV (Parte 1a), Universidad Nacional de la Plata, Observatorio Astronómico.

Examination of the detailed measures in the volume shows that they are very consistent and it is not surprising to read that Mr. Dawson finds the errors of observation to be small. It is to be hoped that he will be able to continue the work so well begun, especially in view of the fact that only one other telescope in the southern hemisphere—Mr. Innes's at Johannesburg—is now regularly used for the measurement of double stars.

R. G. AITKEN.

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*The Eclipse of June 8th, and Nova Aquilae.* "The solar eclipse of June 8th was observed at the Seagrave Observatory at North Scituate, R. I., under the most favorable conditions. The sky was perfectly clear and the seeing was excellent, notwithstanding the low altitude of the Sun. First contact was noted at 6<sup>h</sup>30<sup>m</sup>58<sup>s</sup> Eastern summer time and took place near a pretty group of spots and a cluster of faculae. Last contact took place just as the Sun was on the western horizon and was not noted with any degree of accuracy on that account.

"*Nova Aquilae* was independently discovered that same evening at 11<sup>h</sup>50<sup>m</sup> (summer time). I was in the dome of the 8½-inch and chanced to go out onto the balcony; looking towards the southeast over the lake I saw the star. At first I could scarcely believe my eyes, but after referring to a star map I was soon convinced that it was a Nova. I had no means of announcing it, as the observatory is far from any telegraph or telephone line. At midnight, Saturday, June 8th, I estimated the Nova at 1.4 magnitudes brighter than *Altair* and blue in color, not very different from *Vega*. The two nights following were cloudy."—*From a letter from* FRANK E. SEAGRAVE.

June 11, 1918.